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AUTHOR Francis, Eileen
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ABSTRACT

The Discussion Development Group (DDG) was established by the Scottish Education Department to facilitate research on process innovation in relation to the new curriculum. The DDG resource unit trained teachers to become associates through an inservice training program focused on the observation and analysis of discussion group processes. The goals of the associates were to promote the effective management of classroom discussion skills of students. The DDG encouraged teachers to become engaged in action research projects which promoted a model of classroom discussion. An open system approach to learning was used to analyze transcripts of teacher/student interaction from United States classrooms. The open-system approach emphasized: reflecting on the "here and now" experience; providing a framework for self-analysis; and learning which is unique to each group member. The process shapers in classroom discussion were examined. These include physical setting; group composition; leadership style; boundary system; resistance/resonance dynamic; and personal background. Results of the research indicated that the description of educative exchanes was more effectively served by a holistic approach, emphasizing the methodology of pragmatics applied through the model of transactional evaluation. (DWH)

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THE APPLICATION OF GROUP ANALYSIS TO CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

by

Eileen Francis
Moray House College of Education
Edinburgh
United Kingdom

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THE APPLICATION OF GROUP ANALYSIS

TO CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

This contribution to the multi-disciplinary study is in two sections. Section I describes the context of the study, with reference to methodological issues relevant to a Scottish project and to the multi-disciplinary study. Section II applies the principles of analysis on which the Scottish project is based to the analysis of five transcripts of teacher/student interaction from classrooms in the United States.

I THE SCOTTISH CONTEXT

Since 1977 educationists in Scotland have been engaged in a curriculum development programme which will transform the future education of 14-16 year olds. (Kirk 1981). The role of the teacher as primary information-giver and initiator of classroom events is to evolve into the role of teacher as resource person and enabler. Strategies such as "learning through discussion" and small group-work are to be used as frequently as more directive teaching methods.

The Discussion Development Project

A Discussion Skills Project sponsored by the Scottish Education Department in 1981, as one of a series of multi-disciplinary projects funded in connection with the Government's Development Programme, established a Discussion Development Group (D.D.G.) at Moray House College of Education to respond to the need for research on process innovation in relation to the new curriculum. The research project is examining the development and function of the D.D.G. resource unit which is training teachers to become associates of the D.D.G. through an inservice training programme which focusses on the observation and analysis of discussion group processes. The aims of the associates are to promote the effective management of classroom discussion by teachers and to enable the development of discussion skills in students.

The work of the D.D.G. is based on the premise that it is necessary to scrutinize the strategy of teaching and learning which is described as "learning through discussion". Bullock (1975) states that far too many classroom discussions are in reality no more than a series of "disconnected endeavours to read the teacher's mind" and could be more appropriately described as synchronized rituals of teacher/student talk. Furthermore, when the perceptions of teachers and students on what constitutes discussion are examined, a weakness in the conceptual understanding of the nature of discussion can be identified. It is the task of the D.D.G. to illuminate the process of discussion and to disseminate its findings throughout educational institutions in Scotland.

The D.D.G. encourages teachers to become engaged in small-scale action research projects which promote a model of classroom discussion derived from Bridges (1979), which emphasises

(i) more than one point of view being put forward.
(ii) participants being responsive to different points of view.
(iii) participants being willing to understand or being affected by opinions other than their own.
(iv) participants feeling an obligation to offer opinions and to examine the opinions of others.
(v) participants realising that while listening and observing are important, being a silent member of the group fulfils only half the contract in discussion.

The teachers are supported by two consultants who collate and disseminate the findings of the projects to other teachers with the aim of producing a multiplier effect.

The Multi-Disciplinary Study

Participation in the multi-disciplinary study was seen as an opportunity to focus this network of teachers around a common project. It was hoped that the multi-disciplinary project would be a factor in reinforcing the group cohesiveness generated by contact with the D.D.G. The project offered an opportunity to express a view of the transcripts based on a previously negotiated understanding of the nature of classroom discussion.

Dillon's extensive literature on questioning is regarded as a major resource by the D.D.G. and it was with this respect for Dillon's work that the associates addressed his questions about the transcripts:

> How shall we conceive of these conversations?
>
> How do we describe them?
>
> What might we learn from them about educative exchanges?

The Methodological Basis of the Study

The Discussion Development Project's primary characteristics are those of action research: a case-study approach which addresses itself to a learning milieu (ie. the network of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables which influence the context), as much as to the components of the study itself.

McDonald & Walker (1977) describe the case-study as the examination of 'an instance in action' - the objectives of the research being to reveal the properties of the class to which the instance belongs.

The case-study model raises questions concerning the relationships between the evaluator and the various interest groups that he/she serves. McDonald maintains that these relationships commit the evaluator to a stance which has consequences for the selection of techniques of information-gathering and analysis. He offers a classification which distinguishes between three differing types of evaluation study: the bureaucratic, the autocratic and the democratic. The D.D.G. has approached the evaluation of the transcripts as it approaches its other reflective activities, within a framework of democratic evaulation which has as its key concepts "confidentiality", "negotiation" and "accessibility".

Embedded in the D.D.G.'s understanding of democratic evaluation is another contributory strand, that of the 'human relations' style of research which focuses on institutions undergoing change as social systems and studies the participants response to innovatory schemes. Rippey (1973) describes this as 'transactional evaluation' which is "concerned with the system undergoing change rather than the outcomes of the system's activity".

The D.D.G. aims to analyse the system of group events in a sample of classrooms, schools and regions, the effects of innovation and change on those systems, and the forces and role relationships which can be enhanced to overcome resistance to change.

Of prime significance is the finding of a methodology for describing the quality of the interpersonal relationships within these social systems, holding to Adelman's (1981) definition of collaboration between the researchers and the practitioners' group:

"collaboration within a mutually agreed ethical framework, deriving from practitioners' theory", which implies responsiveness and reflection on the ideas of the multi-disciplinary team.

One of the issues which has emerged from the model of action research operated by the D.D.G. is an interest in describing the nature and quality of the networks initiated by the project in school and college settings, and at regional and national level. The opportunity to develop these ideas internationally and to observe the networking skills of Dillon with his regular dissemination of information, his generation of feelings of value and reciprocity across the network and his capacity to shift the network into associated areas of study, has contributed to the D.D.G.'s development.

II THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TASK

Introduction

It will be understood from this description of the methodological basis of the Discussion Development Project's work that analysis of the transcripts provided for the multi-disciplinary study would prove difficult. The qualitative information required about the network of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables was felt to be absent, and associates comments such as

> "I become aware of the impossibility of judging the discussion by the transcripts alone".
> "There is a risk of objectifying structural features of the transcripts and losing contact with the process dynamics".

express the reservations the D.D.G. had about the value of the contribution it might make to this multi-disciplinary study. Concern was also felt about the practitioners who had provided data for the study without participating in its evaluation, as this challenged our notions of democratic and transactional evaluation.

The initial draft of the D.D.G.'s observation and analysis of the transcripts was therefore tentative. This contribution on the methodology of process thinking, which is implicit to our understanding of the dynamics of classroom discussion, would not have been prepared had there not been some validation of the D.D.G.'s approach to the transcripts by members of the multi-disciplinary team.

An Open-System Approach to Learning

The analysis the D.D.G. offers is based on the belief, articulated by Lawrence (1979), that "we can work more effectively and with greater satisfaction if we come to understand in a direct and personal way the dynamics of groups and inter-group processes within social systems".

The open-system approach emphasises:-

(i) reflecting on the "here and now" experience.
(ii) providing a framework for self-analysis.
(iii) learning which is unique to each group member.

The aim of the open-system approach is to heighten process-thinking. The group leader's role is to communicate to each group member that he/she is in possession of perceptions which can illuminate the whole group process and that the group as a social system is poorer if it does not take advantage of contributions from all its members rather than depending on a few of its members. Indeed the term "leading" is unhelpful as it carries too many connotations of the didactic teaching

role (

role. "Conducting" may describe more accurately the sensitive listening and appropriate responding fundamental to the enabling role to which the group-worker aspires.

The work of Lawrence at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, that of Bramley (1979) of the Institute of Group Analysis and Wittenberg (1983) provide insights into the open-system approach.

These insights contrast with what might be regarded as the "closed" systems which tend to operate in many of our educational institutions. These institutions are organised hierarchically and are based on leadership models which may at times appear authoritarian rather than authoritative. Response to the need for change in a closed system is often partial, the members of the system "structuring a system of defence against anxiety" as Menzies (1960) described it, to avoid coping with the difficult choices which would have to be made if the whole system was opened up to scrutiny.

The Analysis of Classroom Discussion as a Group Event

Associates of the D.D.G. have applied insights relating to the open-system approach to classroom discussion, to develop a concept of applied group analysis. An extract from the transcript of a video-recorded interview with three teachers on completion of their group-work programme indicates the shift in perception necessary before the teacher views the classroom situation as a group event (cf. Appendix).

Observation of classroom discussion from an open-system perspective places the teacher within the group system rather than separating the leadership system of the teacher from the membership system of the student.

> "I've been made aware of . . . . . what's happening in a group of pupils that includes myself". (cf. Appendix)

Singer et al (1979) categorise group events in terms of two basic parameters,

(i) the task system of the group event.
(ii) the psychological levels or systems involved in the task.

The Task System

Tasks can be described on a continuum extending from cognitive/perceptual learning to psychological change. Some tasks can be multi-dimensional providing opportunities for both learning and change, incorporating elements of cognitive/perceptual development with developments in awareness, insight and skill.

The strategy of classroom discussion might be described as the interface of cognitive/perceptual learning and elements of psychological change. Its effectiveness lies in the awareness of the participants of the implicit and explicit assumptions which determine the management of the task. Ineffective classroom discussion is often the result of the teacher's lack of clarity in communicating the aims and objectives of the discussion task to the class members.

The Psychological levels involved in the task

Group events can be further analysed at the levels of (i) group process (ii) interpersonal process and (iii) intrapersonal process. For analysis of this kind both verbal and non-verbal information is required. Mehrabian (1972) reporting a series of research studies on non-verbal communication concludes that the analysis of individual communication behaviour is dependent on non-vocal data (7% verbal, 38% vocal, 55% facial is the finding of one experiment). Analysis of interpersonal

communication and group communication is even more dependent on non-vocal elements, as the proxemics of the situations become more significant.

Application to the Multi-disciplinary Study

When reviewing the transcripts and audio recordings we asked ourselves: is the teacher pursuing a learning goal or a learning/change goal? How are the primary tasks of these group events perceived by student and teacher? Are the objectives content-orientated or process-orientated? How will the teacher evaluate the effectiveness of these group events? Are the students expected to demonstrate learning through cognitive/perceptual change and/or psychological change?

The phrase "learning through discussion" is seen in all its ambiguity when the group event is explored using the task system model. The learning possibilities of the discussion strategy might be permutated in a variety of ways:

eg. 1. The content of the discussion can be oriented towards the achievement of cognitive/perceptual learning goals.

2. The content of the discussion can be oriented towards the psychological end of the continuum to achieve learning/change goals.

The task system of 1 and 2 might be described as discussion in which the student will demonstrate understanding and/or insight in relation to the content of the curriculum.

Other options open to the teacher might relate to process aims and objectives:

3. The process of the discussion will be oriented towards the achievement of cognitive/perceptual learning goals.

4. The process of the discussion will be oriented towards the achievement of psychological learning goals.

The task system of 3 and 4 might be summarized as discussion which gives the student opportunity to demonstrate awareness and insight in relation to the discussion process and an increased capacity in discussion skill.

Analysis of the task system from the data of the transcripts can only be surmise based on partial evidence. The transcripts can be located in the task system referred to as 1 and 2. None of the group events are located in the process task system of 3 and 4. The aims of HK and PR appeared to be to test the student's understanding of reading they have completed on the topic of the American Revolution and multiple personality, therefore cognitive/perceptual gains appeared to be the goal of these group events.

MK, SN and WB appeared to value gains in the development of awareness and insight about the topics of smoking and human relationships, a learning/change task.

The aims of the five teachers could not be said to have been achieved, as contributions were made only by certain class members in all groups. The teachers would be unable to monitor whether the silent members had understanding which they did not demonstrate, or avoided making a contribution because they did not understand. HK and PR must have wondered whether they might have tested their students understanding more effectively using a different strategy. The fact that the teachers were participants in the group event rather than observers of it, would also have an effect on the monitoring function.

None /

None of the teachers made the process dynamics of the discussion an explicit task. Statements which would heighten perception concerning the nature of the discussion in relation to the content themes, or comments which might enable the students to reflect on their management of the discussion task, do not appear in these extracts.

Examination of the transcripts demonstrates how little we know about the participants, particularly those who are classified as listening/observing members of the group. Were they closely engaged in the listening/observing task or were they expressing quite a different message from the one we can hear? The transcripts do not reassure us that all the students have learned to discuss, nor that the teacher has awareness and insight about the effects factors such as physical setting, group composition and style of leadership, have on discussion.

The transcripts present us with samples of classroom discussion in which it can be argued that the implicit assumptions of the teacher about the nature of the task are not shared by the students, where appropriate interaction is experienced by a few students with no reference to the understanding and feelings of the majority of students.

The views of the Associates of the D.D.G. reinforce this description of the discussions. A content analysis of a questionnaire completed by ten associates following discussions about the transcripts, described the physical settings as

> "unsuitable"
> "normal class arrangement"
> "appropriate for teacher/student questioning not for discussion"
> "were some of the students looking at one another's heads?"

The associates were equally dismissive of the group size:

> "Too large. What many teachers euphemistically call discussion"
> "Impossibly large for meaningful discussion to take place"
> "All too big - student does not know class mate's name."
> "Far too large - voices had to be raised - side conversations going on"

With regard to group composition one of the associates was particularly concerned that in HK:

> "7 exchanges out of 63 are from girls but nearly half the group of 30 are girls"

On the theme of leadership the comments were that the discussion were

> "teacher-dominated"
> "traditional teacher role of organiser and initiator - teacher has to be dominant and directive because of numbers"
> "active controlling style"
> "teachers clearly in control - students have no opportunity to lead"

Those teachers who completed the questionnaire and those who conversed about the transcripts were agreed that the interactions did not reflect their perception of effective classroom discussion.

The Transcripts /

The Transcripts as Case Studies

Would the five teachers agree with the assumptions of their D.D.G. colleagues that the transcripts provide examples of classroom interaction which could be more effective? Would HK regard his discussion task and his management of it as qualitatively different from that of WB?

Approaching the transcripts as case studies - instances in action - we would wish to suggest themes which influence all group events implicitly or explicitly, processes of which participants are aware or unaware and which the five teachers might deny or be willing to explore. The processes described shape the group event whether or not they become the task of that event. Interpretative comments on the transcripts are presented with the view that they would require reciprocal validation by the five teachers before full understanding of the group events could be achieved.

Process Shapers in Classroom Discussion

Teachers and students must work typically with the following six process shapers in classroom discussion, three of which can be under conscious control and can readily be made explicit:

(i) Physical setting
(ii) Group Composition
(iii) Leadership style

and three which may be unconscious process shapers and will remain implicit, or can be made explicit, depending on the task of the group:

(iv) The boundary system
(v) The resistance/resonance dynamic
(vi) Personal background
  (a) its influence on perception of the group event
  (b) its effect on teacher/student functioning

Physical setting

Discussion is an activity which requires concentrative listening. It is enhanced if the participants are in close, physical proximity so that the quietest voice can be attended to without strain and eye contact can be maintained with every participant. The physical setting needs to communicate that discussion is a peer relationship which aims to reduce the impact of authority relationships to encourage a view that each participant's contribution is of value. The organisation of the physical setting prior to the discussion taking place will communicate non-verbally to the members of the group, the perception the teacher has of the discussion task. Associates of the D.D.G. frequently comment on the contrast between the physical setting of the D.D.G. and the environment which is provided for discussion in school. Components such as low level, comfortable seating arranged in a circle, in a quiet room without visual or auditory distractions, become an explicit part of our discussion as teachers realise the effect this has on the quality of discussion.

> "We had a staff meeting today. I realised that one of the reasons for us not having a good discussion was because I had to turn round to talk to the people behind me." "As I left the school I saw a departmental meeting going on in one of the classrooms. The staff were seated in rows, just as the children had been, and one of them had his hand up to make a point . . . . . I wouldn't have noticed that before coming to the group."

It is interesting to speculate what effect an 'eye-glance' group and the placement of the teacher within the group, with equal proximity between himself and the members of the group, would have on the educative exchanges of the transcripts?

Group Composition

We know that high cohesive groups are more effective than low-cohesive groups in achieving their respective goals and that members of high-cohesive groups are generally better satisfied than members of low-cohesive groups. We also know that group cohesiveness is reduced the larger the group becomes so that groups of 2-6 members can achieve group cohesiveness more quickly than groups of 12-15 members. Groups of more than 15 members will find that the difficulties they have in achieving group cohesiveness for reasons of group size will interfere with the management of the discussion task.

Other elements related to group composition, which will affect the discussion task, include the differences in performance of mixed-sex groups and same-sex groups, the differences in groups composed of members having diverse, relevant abilities and those having similar abilities.

We would suggest that there was little evidence that these issues had been addressed by the five teachers in the sample group, and that development of the communication potential of each class situation was limited by this lack of attention.

Leadership Style

If we assume that discussion as a classroom strategy is aimed at developing the student's ability to contribute, to listen and to respond effectively within a discussion context, efforts by the teacher to maximise student interaction will be regarded as beneficial.

The teacher needs to recognise that student interaction will be facilitated if he recognises the difference between 'conducting' a group of students and 'leading' a group. The conductor does not necessarily participate verbally in discussion, he may arrange the physical setting, organise appropriate group composition, present a structured task to the group members, and act as observer during the actual discussion process. If he does participate, his contributions will be recognised by his use of statements which either summarize content or comment on process, and he will be aware of the effect his verbal and non-verbal interventions might have in initiating content or validating the authenticity of the discussion. The conductor aims for a style of leadership which will be seen as authoritative rather than authoritarian.

HK represents the antithesis of the conductor, offering us an example of classroom interaction which has few characteristics of discussion. He asks 50 questions and makes 3 statements in a 10 minute sample. In response the students are passive receivers of his controlling style, many of their contributions reduced to one or two word utterances, with few examples of extended utterances or linguistically complex utterances. HK not only controls the questions but authenticates the answers:

HK	17a	"Now you're on the right track"
	18a	"Well, let's get away from pay"
	20a	"Not exactly . . . . . "
	21a	"That's right . . . . . "
	26a	"Very good"

HK as the result of this analysis might decide to consciously reduce his number of questions, to elicit responses through statements or through silence and to include positive reinforcers only for process feedback rather than content feedback. Would such a change in leadership style greatly improve the quality of student interaction? We suggest that it would not unless HK also took account of the issues surrounding the boundary system of the group event. Aspects of the boundary system are not under conscious control and it is this unconscious shaping of process which will now provide material for analysis and reflection on the group events of the transcripts.

The Boundary System

Every group event is limited by boundary constraints, and perceptions about the limits or rules of the task may differ between student and teacher. The most effective discussions demonstrate a clear understanding of the boundary system by leader and members. The group members have contracted in to an event which they assume has certain goals and are satisfied if these expectations are met. Problems may arise if a group having contracted in to fulfil one set of goals perceives itself being directed to work on a task with different goals.

MK, SN and WB are working on tasks which may have caused students to reassess their expectations of the contract. The titles of the courses are 'Christian Relationship', 'Marriage' and 'Society & Christian Lifestyle'. These courses could be addressed on a cognitive/perceptual basis - at a 'knowing about', 'understanding' level - or a psychological change basis - at a 'getting in touch with feelings' or 'reflecting on personal experience' level. The educative exchanges on these topics would only be seen to be of value if the dimensions the teacher thought appropriate to include in the task were in synchrony with the students' perceptions of the task. If, as Egan (1970) states, explicit contracts facilitate desirable behaviour such as self-disclosure, we might conjecture that members of MK, SN and WB's groups who fail to participate may have concerns about the boundary of the task.

The students have also contracted into a group event in which they have certain expectations of the teacher's role. Previous experience may have demonstrated to them that their teacher adopts a 'closed' rather than an 'open' system approach to classroom interaction ie. the teacher has a clear idea of his intentions but the student is less clear about his purpose. The expectations of HK's controlling style will differ from that of SN's more enabling style and to some extent HK has conditioned an interactive response from his students which would be inappropriate in SN's class. HK's students would need time to learn the style of response appropriate to SN and would require some sensitivity to shift from a period of History to a period of Social Education during a school day. It would not be surprising if some students were more able to achieve the transition than others. The fact that we do not know how long HK and SN's students have been working together makes it difficult to interpret the important contribution that group stability and group permanence have had on the development of discussion.

The Dependency Dynamic

Our interpretation of the evidence of the transcripts indicates that there tends to be an impermeable boundary between the leadership and the membership region of the groups. The impermeable boundary is sustained by the teachers' questioning and responding behaviour. MK(4) and SN(2) choose to move into the membership region on two occasions by disclosing their own personal material, but students tend not to take on the leadership of the group. A dependency

dynamic is created, shown in its strongest form in HK and in a weaker form by SN and WB, where students learn unconsciously through experience of the impermeable boundary between leadership and membership tasks that they may not feel their own authority in initiating the task, or shift the work of the group in a direction which may not be sanctioned by the teacher.

It is appropriate to be dependent in some learning situations when the teacher is demonstrating skills which the student has not achieved. It is not appropriate to be dependent when the learning strategy is discussion as the dependency dynamic interferes with the outcome of the discussion task. The dependency dynamic promotes feelings of powerlessness in the students and leads them to express these feelings either in dependence on the teachers' actions or in alienation from interaction.

The D.D.G. hypothesizes that the more inappropriately dependent the student group has been encouraged to become through past experience of a 'closed' system, the more resistant it is to taking opportunities to acquire new skills when the occasion offers itself.

The Resistance/Resonance Dynamic

The success of every group event can be assessed by noting the 'resonance' experienced by the leader and the members of the group in their management of self and the task during discussion. The opposite of resonance is resistance which emerges as a result of inaccurate assumptions, inappropriate role allocations, prejudices and differences in the value systems of the group. Resistance may be used deliberately or unconsciously and has much to do with the "luggage" of our own personal backgrounds which we carry into each group event.

If we examine MK(5) we can observe the teacher coping with resistance among his students in their discussion on smoking. The teacher's leadership style has created a benign, closed system which has provided the students with reassurance that they do not have to take responsibility for the discussion task. The task is located midway on the learning/change continuum - the learning element includes understanding of a Christian life-style and the change element includes developing awareness and insight of the differences in the psychological stance of the student group on social issues. The topic of smoking is a contentious issue in school at the time of the discussion, issues external to the here and now of the group event are having a powerful effect and are tending to contaminate the primary task of the group ie. learning about Christian Relationships. We sense a certain ambivalence on the teacher's part. The group is talking, there is much interesting material being presented but he begins to demonstrate concern about what is actually being achieved. What will the students take away from this discussion as a learning outcome? MK counteracts the resistance to work in the group by asserting his authority as leader and shifting the discussion from one topic to another, which he understands to be the implicit task of the course. The lack of synchrony in the turn-taking of the group at this point reminds us that the management of resistance in closed systems gives inappropriate power and influence to the opinions of the teacher. The teacher in this extract has displayed his "luggage" but he is not able to dispel the students' resistance as the final exchange indicates:

MK	19a	"Does that mean if you don't smoke, you're a better Christian then?
	19b	"It doesn't mean you're a worse one"
		SILENCE (3 secs.)

The effect /

The effect of personal background on the group event

This exchange and the subsequent silence reminds us of the part the expectations and personal histories of both students and teachers play in the life of each group. As a result of these expectations and individual histories it might be anticipated that a number of 'fantasies' or perceptions that have no basis in reality might be influencing the groups' work. The presence of fantasy has much to do with our own personal experiences which have been shaped by the variety of social and institutional groups to which we have belonged in the past. The "luggage" we bring to groups on issues such as power, authority, cooperation and rivalry will affect the interpersonal process. Teachers carry with them their own learning experiences from the classroom. They may have learned to censor the feelings they bring to the group believing that they can maintain discussion at a rational level. They may deny the value of the irrational in exploring and developing the quality of discussion. Students may gain the impression that how one feels about the class is less valuable than what one thinks about it. Student perception may be shaped in the direction of the academic, rational approach which denies the ability to respond spontaneously and sensitively.

The Gatekeepers of Insight

The effect of unspoken personal issues will be highlighted on courses which appear to be discussing feelings, attitudes and values but resist exploration of the feelings of the here and now situation. In MK, SN, WB we might interpret that the personal issues surrounding the group have the effect of putting the boundary system of the group event in conflict with the task system. In WB's session, for example, the talk revolves around the theme of parents and children being open with each other. How open are the students able to be in questioning the role of the teacher? Will the fact that WB uses his authority to validate contributions or to question the validity of contributions have an effect on this group's long-term use of the discussion strategy? WB's role in this extract might be interpreted as the gatekeeper of insight - his benign power filters the gold out of the dross of the students' discursiveness creating an appreciative dependency:

WB	1a	". . . I think that's what he's saying . . . "
	2a	"I would presume that you think . . . "
	5a	"O.K. good. That's a really good illustration there . . . "
	7a	"I think it's probably good"

The Imagery of the Group Event

Foulkes (quoted in Bramley 1979) described the group as a "hall of mirrors in which parts of ourselves are reflected and counter-reflected. We see ourselves in others and others see themselves in us. We like some of what we see and identify it as part of our better selves. We decide to get angry with or deny parts of other people because they remind us of bits of ourselves we prefer to leave hidden".

Associates of the D.D.G. have produced their own imagery:

"I see the group as a tapestry. The threads seemed randomly placed at first but now I'm beginning to see blocks of colour emerging - the shapes are taking on a meaning, just as our discussion is."

"We seem to be digging a hole, a pit. It's dark, there's a lot of mud . . . "

"We're digging a mine. We're finding gold."

APPENDIX

Extract from Transcript of Videorecording with Three Teacher Associates of The Discussion Development Group

EF: Alison, can I ask you what you expected from the project when we began?

AM: Well, I don't know what I really expected, I had always wanted to do group work in school but I haven't done very much of it, I think really because I was then conscious of the fact that I might lose control of the class, lose control of the pupils that I might not achieve anything and I think I came thinking that I might get some help as to how I could [illegible] my skills. I think that's what I really expected; as it's turned [illegible] at's not what happened. But that was my first reaction when I [illegible] ere.

EF: Yes, when you say that's not what happened, perhaps we could spell that out.

AM: Well, when I say that's not what happened obviously I believe my skills have been helped but I think I've been made aware not so much of my own skills but what's happening in a group of pupils and what's happening in a group of pupils that includes myself; and having come to a realisation of what's happening in the group itself that leads me to feel much more confident to tackle group work and to cope with the problems that come up.

EF: Yes, how do you feel about what Alison's saying?

DG: Yes, I agree wholeheartedly, actually I felt when I came here to begin with that I was going to get a check-list that I was just going to go through to make me a better teacher as far as Discussion Skills were concerned and this clearly is not possible and it's not what happened. I think the way that the course has developed has been instructive in the sense that I felt as a member of a group myself I can understand the pupils problems inside a group and I think I've been made aware of their problem. I think listening skills we talked about for some time and I think this is very relevant in this field; I've developed listening skills through this project.

EF: Yes. How off-putting did you find the method to begin with because if you come expecting a check-list and it doesn't happen it must be quite off-putting?

TJ: I think when I spoke of the analytical skills earlier that's perhaps what I meant I thought initially that we'd come along and that through discussion, papers presented that somehow we'd arrive at a set of skills that are immediately identifiable but certainly it was absolutely crucial that we participated in a group. I felt initially when we came along that I was very suspicious of what was going to happen. Because my wife having been in social work and experienced group dynamics and knowing what she had gone through, how members of these groups had broken down in tears and left and left courses and so on. I was somewhat suspicious of the force and power of groups I think.

EF: Right, I remember that.

TJ: But the way it's developed it's been absolutely excellent for really beginning to give us insight and perception into group processes.

Is there evidence of this rich material in the transcripts or are group discussions which focus on process very different from those that focus on content? The D.D.G. would suggest that this material exists in all groups whatever their task, but is not generally made explicit. When the transcripts are examined for themes which might be explored in process-orientated terms we find the following:

HK	3a - 7a 63a - End	Themes of violence?
MK	1e - 1j	Themes of power and authority?
SN	1a - 3b	Themes of envy? rivalry?
PR	23a	Themes of group realities and fantasies?

The essential dilemma of this interpretation is that these themes cannot be addressed in content-orientated courses. If, however, they are not addressed, the themes which emerge as the unspoken work of the group will have an effect on the relationships within a school and on the educational task it intends to fulfil.

We have found that the mechanism of displacement is one of the typically unaddressed themes of group discussion in educational settings. Difficult feelings which emerge in discussion as a result of teacher intervention or student attitude, but which are not regarded as the work of the group, will often be displaced onto something or someone else - the head of department, the headteacher, the school, the school next door, the regional authority .....

MK 1j "Cause like at Loyola, all right, and Loyola is just as strict as this school, and seniors smoke there."

1k "Yeah, but they probably got a whole lounge."

The D.D.G. considers that there is a need for teachers to be reflective about such group processes checking out the realities of their individual perceptions of the class group. It may not be the task of the discussion group to illuminate process in this way, but the teacher's effective management of the task may be dependent on recognition of the processes which are shaping the functioning of the group in discussion.

CONCLUSION

During the first phase of this investigation the D.D.G. experienced the problem of grappling with data which appeared incomplete for an appropriate analysis of these classroom events. Our conceptual framework has been challenged by the task system of the multi-disciplinary study - the educative exchange is a communication process, the non-verbal elements in the communication process carrying significant information in relation to our understanding of the group process.

The reflective spiral of activity in which we have been engaged has demonstrated the value of approaching classroom data from the perspective of different research methodologies. We remain convinced, however, that the description of educative exchanges is more effectively served by a holistic approach, emphasising the methodology of pragmatica applied through the model of transactional evaluation previously described.

This contribution to the multi-disciplinary study asserts the view that discussion is a context shaped by a variety of processes and interactive systems which is different from the examples of discursive teaching represented in the transcripts. The multi-disciplinary study has demonstrated the difficulty of discerning the boundaries of discussion and other aspects of discursive teaching.

The study provides a model for the inter-disciplinary task of defining a whole school policy on classroom discussion which involves students, teachers, administrators and researchers in reflection on their role within the communication network of their own educational setting.

The study also raises questions about the value of discursive teaching in relation to other modes of teaching, such as the expository mode. The continuing task, as our understanding and competence in relation to discursive teaching develops, will be to validate its effectiveness in comparison with expository and enquiry modes of teaching and learning.

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